

Imagined as *us*-American: Patriotic Music, Religion, and Violence Post-9/11

David Kwon,
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

Abstract: *With the common correlation of the patriotic music community to “America,” country music after 9/11, in many respects, could be seen as a site for the reinforcement and construction of American national identity. This article particularly explores the use of country music in the United States to represent and create a political ideology of “imagined” national identity in the time period between September 11, 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in the Spring of 2003. However, the nation, as imagined in these country song lyrics, has very specific dimensions. It is not just any nation. It is perceived (and valued, for that matter) as justifiably aggressive. It is a Christian nation defined in opposition to the Islamic “other.” This targeted racial and religious group is not just an outside foreign “other” but a heavily stigmatized foreigner from within their own country. The mapping of these particular concepts of nation and religion onto mainstream country music constitutes its primary imagined identity.*

Keywords: Patriotic Music, Country Music, Iraq War, Nationalism, Imagined National Identity, Religion, Violence, Post-9/11

Introduction

POLITICAL THEORIST BENEDICT ANDERSON, in his study of the rise of nationalism, argued that a nation is an imagined community: “[This community] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹ This concept of the imagined community is not limited to a nation and, as such, it can serve as a valuable lens through which to examine other imagined communities of various types and sizes. The goal of this analysis is to examine an imagined community with borders that are less clearly defined than those of a nation. This will illuminate some of the many ways in which this process of imagining actually takes place. The community in question is that of the producers and consumers of mainstream American country music. This analysis will be

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso Books, 2006), 6; italics in original.

limited to the time period between the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11) and the early stages of the Iraq War in 2003.

The reasons for choosing this particular time frame are two-fold. First, a major crisis often precedes a time of construction or reformulation of a country's identity. This crisis is more apparent than the ongoing, daily process of identity construction that occur in times of noncrisis. By focusing on the historical context of 9/11 in particular, many of the specific cultural expressions that facilitate, as well as indicate, the imagining of a community become immediately recognizable in a way that is much less transparent in other situations. Focusing on these expressions will provide insight into the subtler ways in which communities in general are imagined. The second reason for limiting the analysis to this particular time frame is that it relates directly to both the event itself and the subsequent increase in militarism and nationalism. The memory of 9/11 and the Second Gulf War are constructed by many of the songs that will serve as the data for this analysis.²

What is being attempted is a sketching of the ambiguous boundaries that defined the mainstream country music industry in the wake of September 11, 2001. This is *not* an attempt to reify this community; rather, it is an attempt to analyze the country music trends that Americans "created" in the wake of these events. I will provide a general account of how this community imagined itself as indicated by the content of the music that this community produced and consumed. Since this is an analysis of the mainstream country music community, the data will be limited primarily to the lyrics of songs that were "popular" during this time period. Popularity of the songs is determined by airplay time on country music radio stations. For the airplay statistics, I have relied on the Billboard Hot Country and Singles Tracks charts, which are based on a national sample of roughly 150 country music stations that are monitored daily. Limited reference to music sales will also be included. The working assumption is that the popularity of these songs is a legitimate basis to make limited claims about country music's imagined community.³

² The American country music industry generally retained a pro-war stance until 2004 when popular opinion turned against the U.S. military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since then, the narrative forms and features in these songs changed from the American metanarrative to personal stories about 9/11, patriotism, faith, and healing.

³ It should be noted that this analysis is only seen as a preliminary step in what has the potential to be a much larger project. Possible avenues for further investigation are enumerated at the end of this analysis.

From the analysis, I found that the country music community has imagined itself primarily in nationalistic terms, though religious identity is also prominent. The collective identity is essentially delineated as staunchly “American” and Christian. In fact, the community is generally imagined *as* America while those people who hold dissenting views are depicted as un-American. This study exposes some of the ways in which one particular aspect of American country music, one that emerged after 9/11, both reflected and constructed the porous boundaries of an imagined nationalist identity. This community, though existing only as a mental construct, is useful in analyzing and illuminating the complexities of human social constructions. The songs produced and consumed by this imagined community were only one means by which identity was constructed. A more nuanced analysis involving the greater context surrounding these songs would be necessary to understand further the process of collective identity construction.

Country Music: The Imagining of a Community through Popular Music

Music, as a part of popular culture, does not simply reflect reality, but it is an act of identity construction and negotiation.⁴ It is an everyday cultural practice to demonstrate, reflect, and provide commentary about the present day, all the while being “the accumulated store” of its relevant cultural products, such as fashion, dance, film, radio, and television.⁵ Hence, popular music is given meaning from its cultural context. Further, this music has rhetorical power primarily because ideologies can be easily expressed through its medium, which “are rhetorical, then to the extent that [lyrics] provide audiences with models—or strategies—for managing the meaning of ongoing

⁴ For similar studies, see Barry Brummett, *Rhetoric in Popular Culture*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018); Theodore Matula, “Pow! to the People: The Make-Up’s Reorganization of Punk Rhetoric,” *Popular Music and Society* 30, no. 1 (2007): 19–38, <http://doi.org/10.1080/03007760500453127>; Michael F. Petracca and Madeleine Sorapure, *Common Culture: Reading and Writing about American Popular Culture*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2007).

⁵ Alan G. Johnson, *Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: A User’s Guide to Sociological Language*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), s.v. “Popular Culture.” Brummett pays particular attention to the rhetorical power of popular media: “If we want to understand how people are influenced on ... issues, how public affairs are nudged in one direction or another, we need to look more at what is happening on television than on the Senate floor. The theory of rhetoric today is increasingly recognizing the important business that is done through popular culture” (Brummett, *Rhetoric in Popular Culture*, 63). Although Brummett’s example is television, the same argument is applicable to popular music, as well.

everyday social struggles.”⁶ In analyzing this process, the consumption of particular songs—with particular ideologies—as opposed to others allows one to define their own imagined community. Additionally, there is a unique relationship between the popularity of the content of a song (which will eventually fade from public consumption on a mass scale) and the imagined community that calls for analysis. The continual changing of the material that serves as the basis for the imagined community is central to how this process of identity negotiation and reinforcement is created. As old songs fade from the charts, new songs must continually reappear in order to reinforce the imagined community. With this constant change in consumption material, there develops a certain level of continuity in the content.⁷ It is this continuity that allows one to roughly define the community boundaries that remain despite the constant change in consumer products.

There are two spheres that are central to the creation of this imagined community. The first sphere of influence is radio, the second is private music ownership. These spheres, *in combination*, support the imagined community of producers and consumers. With radio, there is always the knowledge that hundreds, thousands, and even millions of people are listening to the same song at the same time. As Anderson says regarding newspaper reading, “Each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.”⁸ Although his statement includes newspapers, the same argument applies to popular music and, further nuanced, country music through radio. This temporal connection of action that can be both public and private simultaneously allows for an imagined community of people to share their common experiences with the same product. Meanwhile, music producers and executives intend to capitalize on this sense of unity by making the product “appeal to the widest possible audience.”⁹ Audiences do not require “special” knowledge or disciplined

⁶ Matula, “Pow! to the People,” 22.

⁷ Johnson, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology*, s.v., “Popular Culture.” See also, Rachel D. Godsil, Jessica MacFarlane, and Brian Sheppard, “Pop Culture, Perceptions, and Social Change: A Research Review,” *#PopJustice* 3, no. 4 (2016): 1–34; and José van Dijck, “Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 5 (2006): 357–74, <http://doi.org/10.1080/07393180601046121>.

⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

⁹ Kathleen E. R. Smith, *God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 2. See also, Kim L. Purnell, “Listening to Lady Day: An Exploration of the Creative (Re)Negotiation of Identity Revealed in the Life Narratives and Music Lyrics of Billie Holiday,” *Communication Quarterly* 50, no. 3/4 (2002): 444–66.

competence in order to engage with the popular country music heard on the radio, as compared to a more specialized genre like jazz.¹⁰

In a related process, the act of purchasing (or even pirating) music also facilitates the imagining of a community. Sales figures, charts, countdowns, call-in requests, and music videos all provide consumers with the knowledge that a product that they enjoy is also enjoyed by some portion of the general population. Hence, a community of people with similar music preferences is imagined and reinforced based on their relationship to other consumers. As a result, this process creates social meaning and offers opportunities for consumers to connect with the product on both a personal and cultural level.¹¹ It is the working premise of this essay that one possible way to understand certain aspects of the collective or shared identity of this imagined country music community is to analyze the content of the product that is being shared. As such, the lyrics of popular country songs will be analyzed in an effort to illuminate what this imagined community actually *looks* like.

Analysis of Specific Songs

Although past research has discussed the role of (patriotic) country music in the aftermath of 9/11, the existing literature lacks research into narrative analysis as it has failed to fully examine the essential features of politics in the post-9/11 society (e.g. how specific cultural values and narratives have formed an imagined national community).¹² Hence, the nation

¹⁰ Smith, *God Bless America*, 2. For example, jazz is a countercultural example that is most appreciated when audiences understand the musical rules of the genre. Country music, on the other hand, as a popular music genre, is widely produced and distributed with a commercial intent for mass consumption.

¹¹ For similar arguments, see van Dijk, "Record and Hold," 357–74 and Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511489433>.

¹² Previous research has discussed the role of country music in the discussion of 9/11 in two ways. Some researchers, such as Gabriel Rossman and Randy Rudder who pay attention to the Dixie Chicks controversial denouncement of President George W. Bush (Gabriel Rossman, "Elites, Masses, and Media Blacklists: The Dixie Chicks Controversy," *Social Forces* 83, no. 1 [2004]: 61–79, <http://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2004.0123>; Randy Rudder, "In Whose Name? Country Artists Speak Out on Gulf War II," in *Country Music Goes to War*, eds. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson [Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005], 208–26). Others, such as Chris Willman and Aaron Fox, explore the political nature of country music and its ideological implications (Chris Willman, *Rednecks and Bluenecks: The Politics of Country Music* [New York: The New Press, 2005]; Aaron A. Fox, "Alternative to What? *O Brother*, September 11, and the Politics of Country Music," in *Country Music Goes to War*, eds.

as imagined in these country song lyrics has very specific dimensions. It is not just any nation but a community being imagined (and valued) as justifiably aggressive. It is a Christian nation defined in opposition to the Islamic “other.” This targeted racial and religious group is not just an outside foreign “other” but a heavily stigmatized foreigner from within their own country.

Keeping this in mind, this section will provide analysis of some specific songs as examples. First, when the response of country music to the attacks of September 11 is envisioned, two particular songs generally come to the fore: Alan Jackson’s “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning),” which won the 2002 “Song of the Year” and “Single of the Year” at the Academy of Country Music, as well as the 2003 “Best Country Song” Grammy Award. The next single is Toby Keith’s “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American).” These two songs directly address the events of 9/11 and both reached #1 on the Billboard Hot Country Singles and Tracks charts.¹³ They both garnered a huge amount of attention by the media, but for very different reasons. Jackson’s song, which he debuted at the Country Music Awards on November 7, 2001, is a slow, sorrow-filled rumination on reactions (both real and imagined) to the attacks.¹⁴ Keith’s song from May of 2002, on the other hand, is an aggressive endorsement of American national and military power.¹⁵

Jackson’s song opens with the line, “Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day?” The lyrics that comprise the subsequent lines detail the actions and reactions of an imagined cross-section of the American population to the events of 9/11. There is a man with his family out in their yard, a person working on a stage in Los Angeles, a teacher in a classroom full of children, and someone driving along an interstate highway. The net is cast wide in order to demonstrate the way in which Americans are connected through this single event. America is imagined as a place where normal, good (and essentially innocent) people are simply going about their daily motions until their private lives are disrupted from Islamist terrorists. Jackson then describes several different reactions to the events of that day ranging from dusting off an old Bible and reconnecting with God, to buying a

Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson [Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005], 164–91).

¹³ “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, December 29, 2001: 38; and “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, July 20, 2002: 38.

¹⁴ “Artist Chart History – Alan Jackson,” *Billboard*, accessed February 20, 2020, www.billboard.com/music/alan-jackson/chart-history/HSI/song/412316.

¹⁵ “Artist Chart History – Toby Keith,” *Billboard*, accessed February 20, 2020, www.billboard.com/music/toby-keith/chart-history/HSI/song/420169.

gun, to weeping for children who lost their family members. It is an imagined descriptive account until the chorus is delivered:

I'm just a singer of simple songs
I'm not a real political man
I watch CNN but I'm not sure I can tell you
The difference in Iraq and Iran
But I know Jesus and I talk to God
And I remember this from when I was young
Faith hope and love are some good things he gave us
And the greatest is love

It is here that Jackson's personal identity is asserted in a way that connects him with these "everyday" Americans.¹⁶ Jackson characterizes himself as simple, *not* political, but Christian. The simplicity of Jackson's description of himself is central to the message: *I am a normal person just like you and I understand what you are going through*. The long tradition of associating country music with everyday Americans who are honest and simple people is alive and well in these lyrics. Jackson's message resonates in part because he has situated himself within the stereotype of the typical country music listener.¹⁷ The simplicity and lack of political savvy is implicitly contrasted with politicized intellectualism.¹⁸ The way to understand and respond to these

¹⁶ Country music often reflects on and characterizes "everyday" American life events, being regarded as one of the major themes of the genre. As George Lewis explains, country music has "concerns for community, home and family values that seem too often disrupted and lost in contemporary American lives, and an orientation toward a simpler, often rural (and more than partly imagined) past filled with the romantic warmth of primary, caring relationships" (George H. Lewis, "Lap Dancer or Hillbilly Deluxe? The Cultural Constructions of Modern Country Music," *Journal of Popular Culture* 31, no. 3 [1997], 167, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1997.3103_163.x). See also Ralph E. Hanson, *Mass Communication: Living in a Media World* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2018), 182–183.

¹⁷ Reflecting on everyday events, here the common themes include relationships, family, and work, which help listeners identify with the song. See John Buckley, "Country Music and American Values," in *All that Glitters: Country Music in America*, ed. George H. Lewis (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 198–207.

¹⁸ This narrative is one of the common themes found in country music: "Country music is populist music, plain and simple....It's everyday driving to work, drinking a beer after work with friends, dancing on the weekend kind of music. Forget red states vs. blue states kind of music: Good country music – as ever – is just about real life and how it applies to daily life" (Chet Flippo, "Nashville Skyline Presidential Politics and Red-Blue States Debate Linger: Germs and Jesus and Country Music," *CMT News*, November 24, 2014, <http://www.cmt.com/news/1494154/nashville-skyline-germs-and-jesus-and-country-music/>).

tragic events, for Jackson, is not to intellectualize the situation but to turn to the central message of Christianity: love. It is not difficult to imagine that the centrality of Christian love is deliberately contrasted with the Muslim aggression of 9/11. By the time that Jackson wrote this song in late October 2001, the identity of the “them” against which many Americans were defining themselves was already established as “radical Islamic fundamentalists.” As such, it seems reasonable to assume that the explicit referencing of Christianity is, at least in part, meant to distinguish an “us” from a “them” in that sense. This song works as both an expression of an imagined community and as a tool for helping to construct the boundaries of that imagined community. The message is one of unity despite different reactions, as it promotes a “traditional” way of living American values, such as simple living, family, God, and individual rights to defend oneself, especially when attacked.¹⁹

The professed non-political stance of Jackson’s song stands in stark contrast to Toby Keith’s “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue,” which premiered in 2002 and eventually reached the #1 ranking in the *Billboard* “Hot Country Singles and Tracks.”²⁰ Keith asserts that a unified front of “American girls and American guys” will never fail to salute the flag of the United States. Here, America is imagined as inherently and uniformly patriotic by most country singers after 9/11. This belief carries with it the understanding that a lack of patriotism is tantamount to being “un”-American. What are the characteristics of this particular brand of patriotism?²¹ First and foremost, there is an aggressive nationalism that turns any affront to the nation into a personal attack that requires physical retaliation. The vague concept of “freedom” is one that is directly communicated by the national anthem phrase “land of the free.” Apart from “nation” and “freedom,” the only other concept directly employed by Keith is “justice.” The thrust of the song is not conceptual but, rather, reactionary and violent. The events of September 11

¹⁹ Joseph M. Palmisano, *World of Sociology* (Farmington Hills, MI: The Gale Group, 2001), 120.

²⁰ “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, May 25, 2002: 27; “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, July 20, 2002: 38.

²¹ Patriotism basically means “love of country.” Although it generally means loyalty to country, determining what specific actions fall under the definition of patriotism is challenging and contentious. It can be interpreted as “uncritical loyalty,” meaning that citizens must not criticize their leaders, especially during war or other national crises; yet it can also be defined as “defending the country’s ideals,” allowing citizens to protest against unjust movements or corrupted authorities. In either case, patriotism is strongly associated with nationalism and its corresponding ethos and social movements. See Karen Christensen and David Levinson, eds., *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World*, vol. 3 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2003), s.v. “Patriotism.”

require a display of American power to counter the cowardly “sucker punch [that] came flyin’ in from somewhere in the back.” The American way is directly opposed to the cowardice displayed by “them”; the American way is to “put a boot in your ass” for “rattling [our] cage.” Keith references the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan with the telling phrase, “Man, we lit up your world like the fourth of July”—note the equation of self with the nation and, in particular, the United States military. “We” is imagined as identical to the U.S. itself; the military acts as an extension of good, patriotic Americans.

The use of national symbols is central to many of these post-9/11 country songs as they have “powerful nonverbal (voice, instruments, rhythm) as well as verbal (words, lyrics, repetition) components.”²² Keith utilizes the symbols of “old glory,” the Fourth of July, Uncle Sam, the Statue of Liberty, the bald eagle, and the Liberty Bell to conjure up a singular “United” States of America. The co-opting of these symbols is even more apparent in the music video that accompanies the song. The video includes footage of Keith playing concerts with crowds of soldiers cheering, out in the field with soldiers, a dizzying array of U.S. flags and other items (including his guitar) adorned with red, white, and blue stripes, soldiers firing assault rifles, and a particularly enthusiastic display of soldiers cheering when Keith delivers the line, “We’ll put a boot in your ass, it’s the American way.” The imagery reinforces the notion that the imagining of the country music community at this time involved a one-to-one mapping of national identity onto the community.

Toby Keith also released an album in 2003 titled, *Shock’n Fall*, on which he delivered two other “patriotic” tracks: “American Soldier” and “The Taliban Song.” The former chronicles the life of an imagined U.S. soldier heading off to war and saying goodbye to his family. The latter is a deliberately comedic song in which Keith provides an imagined account of an Afghan man and his relationship to the Taliban, including the effects of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. The lyrics are startling in their unabashed stereotyping, essentializing, and “othering,” but those aspects are, of course, played up for comedic effect. Keith characterizes the Afghan as a “camel-herdin” man who lives in a two-bedroom cave in North Afghanistan with his wife. It is interesting to note that the song sympathizes with the plight of this

²² Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton Jr., *Persuasion and Social Movements*, 6th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2007), 155. The use of these symbols is central to many of these post-9/11 country songs, as well as many of the songs written before September 11 that gained popularity on the country music charts after that day.

man by chronicling his hatred of the Taliban regime despite distancing “us” from him by depicting him as essentially a poor “caveman.” The man has not seen his wife since the Taliban forced her to “wear a scarf over her head,” and he is fantasizing about escaping this oppression. Half way through the song, Keith sings, “I know where you’re coming from, brother,” in a display of sympathetic unity. He even goes so far as to imagine this man praying to Allah for deliverance, which comes in the form of U.S. jets dropping bombs “all over their holy land” resulting in the cowardly retreat of the Taliban. The actions of the United States are salvific, which coincides nicely with the official U.S. government rhetoric that accompanied the war efforts. Again, the nation is mapped onto the country music community.

In a similar vein to “The Taliban Song,” country music comedian Ray Stevens released a song in February 2002 entitled, “Osama Yo’Mama,” which became a best-selling single on the country charts.²³ Like “The Taliban Song,” Stevens’ song performs the distinctively non-comedic work of creating us/them dichotomies, despite its humorous tinge. Osama bin Laden is depicted as having his turban wrapped too tightly when he was a child, living in a cave with bats, and on the same moral level as Hitler. The perpetrators of 9/11 are characterized again as cowardly, and Stevens compares the events of that day to Pearl Harbor. It is not surprising that major historical events and national symbols are employed so regularly in these songs. Calling on collective memory is an extremely effective tool for linking both communities and events. In addition, like Keith’s songs, the righteous anger of the United States is depicted as combatting the evil of the enemy. Stevens sings, “I don’t think you will enjoy our game of search and destroy / We got your terror right here and we gon’ run it up yo’ rear.”

Another country song that draws a strong distinction between “us” and “them” is “It Ain’t No Rag, It’s a Flag” by Charlie Daniels. As the title suggests, the fury and aggression behind each delivered line strokes patriotic fervor. Daniels refers to Americans collectively as “we” as he sings, “When you mess with one, you mess with us all,” exposing his demand for American solidarity. The primary image used to make and us/them distinction is the contrasting of the U.S. flag with the “rag” worn on the heads of the enemy. Daniels sings that the flag is “a symbol of the land where the good guys live,” from which we can guess that the “rag” is a symbol of where the “bad guys” live. What characterizes the “bad guys”? Again, it is cowardice. He belts out lines, such as “you’re a coward and a fool” and “we know you’re gonna run.”

²³ “Top Country Singles Sales,” *Billboard*, February 2, 2002: 52.

He even provides “them” with some advice: “You can crawl back in your hole like a dirty little mole.” This dehumanizing of the enemy is a recurring theme in many of the songs. All of these negative characteristics, of course, are in stark contrast to who the “we” is. Who are we? “We” are *not* cowardly, as Daniels underscores when he sings “these colors don’t run” and “this is the land of the brave.” Also, “we believe in God and we believe in justice, we believe in liberty.” According to Daniels, “we” are a people distinguished by our Christian beliefs and ethics, which unify “us.” Again, his appeals to national symbols, to American bravery and enemy cowardice, and to patriotic and religious unity are central to this imagined community. These same sentiments are expressed in an older song from Daniels, “In America,” re-released after September 11 with a few altered lyrics (as it was first released in 1980 and the “them” against which he was defining America was originally Russia—what is telling that these types of substitutions can be made so easily).

Hank Williams Jr. also reworked one of his older songs into a new version that made its way into the country charts in November 2001.²⁴ “America Will Survive” was a new version of “A Country Boy Can Survive,” trading on the same themes of national unity (“we’re all united from the country to the town”), cowardly enemies versus brave Americans (“you can’t scare us out and you can’t make us run”), and national symbols.

A less aggressive response to September 11 was that of Randy Travis who released “America Will Always Stand” in late October 2001.²⁵ This song, like several of the others, capitalizes on lines from “The Star-Spangled Banner” to help reinforce an identity of national unity. America is “the home of the brave” and the “land of freedom.” He even incorporates the Pledge of Allegiance (“one nation, under God”) to reinforce the idea of an America imagined as Christian. The title of the song, which is also the chorus, imagines the nation as immortal. Again, a particular national identity constructed in a strong defense of Christian beliefs and moral values is mapped onto the country music community of producers and consumers.

There are two other popular songs that directly addressed the buildup to the war in Iraq: Darryl Worley’s “Have You Forgotten” and Clint Black’s “Iraq and I Roll.” “Have You Forgotten” reached #1 on April 12, 2003 after debuting at the beginning of March, just a few weeks before the start of the Iraq War.²⁶ After reaching top place, it remained at the top of the charts for

²⁴ “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, November 10, 2001: 38.

²⁵ “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, October 27, 2001: 38.

²⁶ “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, April 12, 2003: 26.

eight weeks.²⁷ The song makes a case for the legitimacy of going to war with Iraq and, in doing so, Worley actually conflates Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein to a certain degree. He makes a case for going to war with Iraq by chastising those who say “[we] shouldn’t worry ‘bout bin Laden.”²⁸ This direct connection between the events of 9/11 and the reason for going to war in Iraq parallels one of the primary arguments for the war that was advanced by the Bush Administration—a so-called link between al-Qaeda and Iraq, which proved to be entirely false. Worley asserts that there are things worth fighting for, namely “our freedom, and this piece of ground.” Hence, the mainstream country music community imagines itself as identical with the national identity proper.

Black’s “Iraq and I Roll” is similar to Worley’s song in that American military force in Iraq is depicted as completely justified. The reasons given for the legitimacy of American military action are that “there’s no price too high for freedom” and we “can’t ignore the devil, he’ll keep coming back for more.” The common characterizations of “them,” as distinguished from “us,” are once again at play. Black delivers the line, “They can be no more than cowards,” after angrily stating that terrorism is not man-to-man fighting. It is an odd argument to make given that he also glorifies the use of “smart bombs” that will “find stupid people too,” which is hardly man-to-man combat. That does not seem to matter though as long as the cowardice of the enemy is conveyed in opposition to the bravery of Americans. After all, what the troops are really doing is “tak[ing] out the garbage for the good old USA.”

These two songs must also be understood as demonstrating that to be unpatriotic, defined here as not assenting to the government’s line of justification for the war in Iraq, is also to be un-American. The unity expressed so explicitly in many of the earlier songs has given way to more normative statements of what that unity must entail. In a sense, as time passed after September 11, 2001 and the national rhetoric concerning appropriate responses became more divided, the country music community began imagining itself as the refuge of all “true” Americans who understood what was at stake and what had to be done. The unified national identity imagined earlier no longer mapped as easily onto the country music community due to a more pronounced set of divisions within the nation. Despite these developments, however, the identity of the country music community was still

²⁷ “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, May 17, 2003: 39.

²⁸ “Artist Chart History – Darryl Worley,” *Billboard*, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://www.billboard.com/music/darryl-worley/chart-history/HSI/song/431284>.

imagined as courageous in opposition to the cowardice of the enemy, and at least still united among themselves.

Another song released just as the Iraq War began (though written earlier) was the Warren Brothers' "Hey, Mr. President." This song is an address to the President of the United States and expresses sympathy for how difficult it must be to hold that office in a time of crisis. It includes the lines: "And hey, Mr. President, our kids in the Middle East, I guess you gotta fight sometimes to find a way to keep the peace," which can be taken to reference the war in Afghanistan or as a justification for the recently begun war in Iraq. The Warren Brothers, in typical country music fashion, show their support for the U.S. military by asking the President to thank the mothers whose children have died for their country. This song, as suggested in the others, expresses an imagined national unity through the lyrics, "We ain't just Democrats, we ain't just Republicans, it's all for one and one for all, we're all Americans."

Many of the songs that rose to prominence on the country music charts after 9/11 do not directly reference the attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, etc. Instead, these songs fall under what could be termed generically as "patriotic" expressions of pride in country and support for the U.S. military. Many of these songs were released before September 11, 2001, but they either took on new meaning after the attacks and subsequent developments or the sentiments expressed in them resonated with listeners in light of the events of that day.

A prime example of this phenomenon is Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA," which was originally released in 1983 but jumped back into the country music charts at #16 on September 29, 2001.²⁹ As another example, the unabashedly patriotic and upbeat song, "Only in America" by Brooks and Dunn, had already been in the charts for two months, peaking at #5 before it then rose to the top position after 9/11.³⁰ In a stroke of coincidence, the first line of the song actually mentions New York City, which was undoubtedly partially responsible for its rise in popularity. The song imagines a nation that is unified by the "American dream" and posits that this dream is not attainable anywhere else in the world.³¹ It is an expression of American superiority as defined against the inferiority of all other nations. The fact that this song gained its highest level of popularity after the attacks indicates the way in which the country music community was actively constructing an identity in

²⁹ "Hot Country Singles and Tracks," *Billboard*, September 29, 2001: 31.

³⁰ "Hot Country Singles and Tracks," *Billboard*, October 27, 2001: 38.

³¹ "Artist Chart History – Lee Greenwood," *Billboard*, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://www.billboard.com/music/lee-greenwood/chart-history/HSI/song/2188>.

the aftermath of that day by seeking musical expressions that resonated with what they were feeling (or wanted to feel).

A similar process can be seen in the rising popularity of the song “Riding With Private Malone” by David Ball. This song was released a few weeks before September 11 and after the attacks, it began to climb the charts, eventually peaking at #2. The song is an imagined story of a man who buys an old 1966 Corvette and finds a note in the glove box from a private in the Vietnam War named Andrew Malone.³² The note says that if someone is reading it, then he did not make it home from the war. The man who buys the car then imagines Private Malone riding next to him whenever he drives it and eventually he imagines Private Malone saving him from the fiery wreckage after he crashes the car on a rainy night. Private Malone is depicted as essentially innocent—the good soldier simply fighting and sacrificing his life for his country. It is interesting to note that this song gained in popularity after September 11 despite the fact that the attacks did not directly involve American military personnel fighting for the nation. In the imagined community of country music, sacrifice for the country seems to have been equated, on some level, with the victims of the attacks. This could be related to the rhetoric that immediately began after 9/11 in which the necessity for military retaliation became a primary issue.

Another song that expressed an extraordinarily patriotic message and resonated with country music listeners after September 11, despite being written months before the events of that day, was Aaron Tippin’s “Where the Stars and Stripes (and the Eagles Fly).” The song debuted at #34 on the charts on October 6, then it steadily rose, peaking at #2.³³ It was also one of the top ten country singles in sales for more than seventy weeks.³⁴ As one would expect given the title, this song relies heavily on national symbols to express an immense amount of pride in being a citizen of the United States.³⁵ Apart from the flag and eagle mentioned in the title and the chorus, Tippin also employs the images of the Statue of Liberty and the Liberty Bell. Tippin expresses that by the grace of the Christian God, he has been born in “an extraordinary place” where “happiness ain’t out of reach [and] hard work pays off the way it should.” He reminds his listeners that freedom is not free—there is a price to

³² “Artist Chart History – David Ball,” *Billboard*, accessed February 20, 2020, www.billboard.com/music/david-ball/chart-history/HSI/song/407818.

³³ “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, January 12, 2002: 32.

³⁴ “Top Country Singles Sales,” *Billboard*, May 3, 2002.

³⁵ “Artist Chart History – Aaron Tippin,” *Billboard*, accessed February 20, 2020, www.billboard.com/music/aaron-tippin/chart-history/HSI/song/410042.

be paid. He also reminds them that true Americans pledge allegiance to the flag and “if that bothers you, well that’s too bad.” Tippin expresses himself as a defender of national identity, and this message was obviously close enough to how the country music community wanted to imagine itself after (and, arguably, before) September 11 to earn Tippin a small fortune (a portion of which he donated to the Red Cross).³⁶

The fact that these songs were written before 9/11 indicates that many of the sentiments expressed after that day were not new developments; rather, they were extensions, reiterations, and reformulations of ideas that are pervasive in country music in general. The country music community was imagined as inextricably linked to national patriotism before September 11; but in the songs penned afterwards, the importance of reiterating that link became central to the message being both produced and consumed. Even though many of the messages were not new, the emergence of a new “them” against which to define “us” had a safe space for expression in country music. “They” had to be defined so that “we” could know how to relate to them and, of course, how to dominate over them.

It is important to note that renditions of “The Star-Spangled Banner” by Faith Hill and “God Bless America” by LeAnn Rimes were extremely popular as well in the weeks and months following September 11.³⁷ These songs are central to how the national identity of the United States is expressed and reinforced generally and the popularity of these particular renditions speaks to the way in which national identity is so central to the way in which the country music community imagines itself among all other Americans.

Broader Analysis: What are the Characteristics of This Imagined Community?

Despite the particularities of the characterizations in each of the songs analyzed above, a roughly bound imagined country music community does emerge. This collective identity is constructed based on certain political ideologies and social values, all of which are largely shared with the audience. In other words, just as the patriotic pop-music industry has done in the past, the country music industry takes advantage of the genre’s musical form to share its values, influence its audience, and take an active (and even aggressive)

³⁶ Billboard Staff Report, “Tragic Events Commemorated with Concerts, Videos – and Silence,” *Billboard*, September 7, 2002.

³⁷ “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, September 29, 2001: 31; “Hot Country Singles and Tracks,” *Billboard*, October 27, 2001: 38.

role in constructing musical narratives to defend a certain political stance (e.g. the overall pro-war arguments through lyrics).³⁸ One distinctive feature is that this genre adds to a metanarrative of its commercial foundation in Nashville, Tennessee and that of its associated Southern stereotypes of communities (e.g. white evangelical Protestants) that the United States is a community of “everyday” industrious-yet-simple, innocent, and faithful Americans who love their (Christian) God and (God-blessed) land.³⁹

Plainly, all the songs examined in this paper are observed as supporting American “traditional” values and themes such as relationships, family, and faith.⁴⁰ As opposed to recent studies suggesting that country music does not directly refer to any political ideology, the use of these “traditional” images/narratives in each of the song’s rhetorical expression imply that the country music community—both the industry and fan bases—utilize them to promote a political ideology, which calls for American citizens to defend conservative values and the political party sponsoring them.⁴¹ In particular,

³⁸ The patriotic pop-music industry has produced songs often associated with conservative political ideology and conventional values; yet, their musical narratives have been persuasive to the public mainly due to the musical forms themselves that can effectively—naturally, believably, and emphatically—stretch arguments that would not work well in any other format. For details, see Stewart, Smith, and Denton, *Persuasion and Social Movements*.

³⁹ These associations with Southern images (and their assumed demographic stereotypes) can be traced to the time when the country music genre was called “hillbilly music.” For details, see Hanson, *Mass communication*. In addition, on a related note regarding race/whiteness and American national identity, sociologist Ron Eyerma contends that country music can be understood as a part of White Power music movements since country music strives to unite people who are bound together by their conventional belief that promotes white nationalism. See Ron Eyerma, “Music in Movement: Cultural Politics and Old and New Social Movements,” *Qualitative Sociology* 25 no. 3 (2002): 443–458.

⁴⁰ See esp., Buckley, “Country Music and American Values,” 198–207.

⁴¹ For example, Robert W. Van Sickle conducted a survey on country music from 1960 through 2000 and concluded that country music has less to do with any political role than is often assume. Robert W. Van Sickle, “A World without Citizenship: On (the Absence of) Politics and Ideology in Country Music Lyrics, 1960–2000,” *Popular Music and Society* 28 no. 3 (2005), 313–331. Further, as examined in this paper, Alan Jackson’s song “Where Were You?” clearly separates the singer/the narrator himself from any form or knowledge of political ideology; he does not support any political parties (e.g. “I ain’t no Democrat, I ain’t no Republican”). However, this separation itself can actually represent or even reinforce the country music community’s ideology (both the industry and fan base). While the lyrics are perceived as a representative voice of “everyday” Americans who ought to be ignorant of political issues, these constructed lyrics ironically suggest the idea that country music has a specific political agenda. For example, most songs examined in this paper including, Jackson’s song, support a Republican political ideology by: 1) identifying what their audience expects in terms of political roles in the wake of 9/11; and 2) sponsoring institutions to defend these

country music's common narrative on "everyday" events, which promote a pro-"traditional" ethos, are deeply embedded in conservative cultural beliefs, which in turn form its political ideology. This is because conservatism or conservative political ideals often foster a simplistic worldview, easily defining right and wrong, "us" and others, or "blessed" Christians and "cursed" Muslims.⁴² Likewise, conservatism not only promotes conventional values such as family and other traditional relationships in churches, neighborhoods, and rural life, but it also justifies violent aggression for reasons of defending Americans, families, churches, neighborhoods, and lands more than their liberal counterparts.⁴³ Therefore, the country music genre, especially in the wake of 9/11, which either comments upon or visually translates part of the narrative content, operates as a political vehicle to justify, defend, and reinforce a pro-military conservative ideology.

Further, the country music community is generally imagined *as* America while those people who hold dissenting views are implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) depicted as un-American. This was particularly evident in the controversy that erupted after Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks commented on stage that she was ashamed that President Bush was from Texas. The backlash from this statement included country music radio stations sponsoring events in which listeners brought their Dixie Chicks albums to specific locations to be destroyed, sometimes in dramatic fashion such as being crushed by a bulldozer.⁴⁴ These are explicit instances of community definition and identity construction. Of course, this was not a monolithic display of collective identity; there were still people buying Dixie Chicks music and attending the band's live shows. What it does demonstrate, however, is that Maines' comments were contrary to the views held by a large portion of

expected values and their means to that end including war campaigns—or the presence of American troops itself if not directly referring to the war. Further, genre scholar Rick Altman argues that all the genres of art and literature are not and cannot be neutral since they all have political/social biases (Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]).

⁴² Palmisano, *World of Sociology*, 120.

⁴³ Willman, *Rednecks and Blunecks*, 8. Country music's perceived pro-war stance (including just war rhetoric for self-defense) has been historically acknowledged by Sony Music Nashville, the heart of the country music industry's conservative nature and, in turn, utilized by political leaders such as former Presidents Richard Nixon and George W. Bush. See also Timothy D. Taylor, *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226312026.001.0001>.

⁴⁴ Unlike the Dixie Chicks, most country music artists and industry leaders kept a pro-war stance in the wake of 9/11. See Rossman, "Elites, Masses, and Media Blacklists," 61–79 and Rudder, "In Whose Name?," 208–26.

country music producers and consumers. The imagined country music community, whatever affirmative statements could be used to describe it, was definitely *not* composed of people who would entertain such unpatriotic thoughts, and these demonstrations were meant to emphasize that point.

Therefore, with the common correlation of the patriotic music community to “America,” country music after 9/11, in many respects, could be seen as a site for the reinforcement and construction of American national identity, much like the newspaper did in Benedict Anderson’s original analysis. Again, this nation is imagined but also valued as justifiably aggressive. In each song’s constructive lyrics, this aggressiveness is rationalized in order to appeal to both the country music industry and fan-based communities. It is never cowardly like the enemy. It is proud, hardworking, and *innocent*. It is “good.” It is the locus and defender of “freedom.” It embodies a Christian nation where Americans are blessed to be part of it—which is strikingly distinguished from the Islamic “other” who is cursed to be part of the devil’s plan to destroy the nation’s conventional values.⁴⁵ The mapping of these particular concepts of nation and religion onto the mainstream country music community constitutes its primary imagined identity. It is imagined *as America*.

It is clear that religious elements are incorporated into the narratives portrayed through the country music lyrics. The collective identity of this imagined America is fundamentally characterized as Christian so as to support a socially and politically conservative ideology. Christianity serves as a means of political legitimacy in these songs as it is depicted as an appropriate source to provide answers in the wake of tragedy and postwar contexts—whether the narrative of each song builds up the American metanarrative (i.e. the metanarrative of American exceptionalism) or it tells individual stories about war, faith, and sharing “traditional” values that simply match the country music industry’s interests.⁴⁶ Hence, the gist of the narrative is that country music defends a political ideology that “pulls the Christian card”—or the role of Christian faith in the public sphere—to justify war and further aggression against the Islamic other. At worst, this narrative contributes to the belief that

⁴⁵ For more details, see the theoretical analysis of Greg Bankoff, “Regions at Risk: Western Discourse on Terrorism and the Significance of Islam,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no.1 (2003): 413–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100390242929> and Herbert W. Simons, “From Post-9/11 Melodrama to Quagmire in Iraq: A Rhetorical History,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2007): 183–94.

⁴⁶ See Sarah E. Quay and Amy M. Damico, *September 11 in Popular Culture: A Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010); Christine Lee Gengaro, “Requiem for A City: Popular Music’s Response to 9/11,” *Popular Music and Society* 32, no. 1 (2009): 25–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007760802191508>.

the United States is a Christian nation with a divine right to protect its values and institutions from Islamic invaders, further rationalizing a belief that Americans should fight for their Christian God by marginalizing Muslims and Arab nationals.⁴⁷ Further, this narrative can feed into the discussions of Islamophobia and the othering of Arabs, Islam, and Asians—since during the time under consideration there was a sizeable Muslim and Arab population in the United States who were very much subject to the processes of “the imagined as *us*-American.” Plainly, they were not an “other” across the globe (and even in the American society), but a heavily stigmatized, securitized, and targeted other within these processes of American nationalism.

In the surge of patriotic rhetoric that flourished in America after the destruction of September 11, 2001, country music emerged as a vehicle for both the expression and construction of a patriotic national identity. The intention of this analysis was not to posit the existence of a consistently unified community of “country music fans” who share a particular set of values, morals, demographic features, or political views. No such monolithic and essentialized group exists in reality and arguing for the existence of one is to incorrectly simplify a much more complex issue. Instead, the article merely elucidated some of the ways in which one particular aspect of country music, that emerged after September 11, 2001, both reflected and constructed the porous boundaries of an imagined patriotic community. This community, though existing only as a mental construct, is useful to analyze as a way to illuminate the complexities of human social constructions. The songs produced and consumed by this imagined community were only one means by which identity was constructed and a more nuanced analysis involving the greater context surrounding these songs would be necessary to understand the process of collective identity construction.

⁴⁷ Even in the so-called secular age, religion plays an integral role of serving as a motivational tool in world politics. The political role of Christianity in the United States is just one example. The result is that Christians sometimes promote American exceptionalism, claiming it is only because of God that the United States even exists. Therefore, it is worthwhile to fight for God against foreign enemies. Of course, Christians also play a positive role in fostering democracy, reconciliation, and peace around the world. For this argument, see Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011).

Conclusion: Research Limitations and Future Research

It should be noted that this analysis is only a preliminary step in what has the potential to be a much larger project. There are several possible areas of further inquiry that would help to flesh out the outline provided here. For example, an analysis of country radio programs during this same time frame would be invaluable for providing more contexts for these songs. Relying on the lyrics written by a few people to characterize an imagined community comprised of millions of people who consume and utilize these songs is an extremely limited venture. It is useful, but the tentative conclusions should be checked against other data sets.

It is valuable to note that all of the songs that directly addressed the events of September 11, 2001 (or the subsequent U.S. military actions) and had made their way up the charts were written and performed by men. The only popular songs by women that fit into the poorly defined “patriotic” category were recordings of the national anthem and “God Bless America” by Faith Hill and LeAnn Rimes, respectively. There are certainly many capable women in country music who could have written and performed songs that directly referenced 9/11 (and perhaps some did), but that is not what was found on the country music charts.⁴⁸ An exploration of this gender disparity would undoubtedly return interesting results, but any such analysis attempted at this time would be pure armchair speculation and therefore not appropriate to include here.

It would also be valuable to extend this analysis to more recent songs that have been popular on country radio. There are several songs that directly reference soldiers in the Iraq War and their families such as Darryl Worley’s “I Just Got Back From a War,” John Conlee’s “They Also Serve,” and Chely Wright’s “Bumper of My SUV.” Many of the same themes, symbols, and messages are present, but an analysis of possible differences would be particularly helpful in furthering this study. It would also be helpful to look at country music responses to the first U.S./Iraq war in which the “terrorism” component was not present to the same degree, though there was still a perceived threat.

⁴⁸ For gender-related studies on country music communities, see Melissa A. Click and Michael W. Kramer, “Reflections on a Century of Living: Gendered Differences in Mainstream Popular Songs,” *Popular Communication* 5, no. 4 (2007): 241–62 and Lesley Pruitt, “Real Men Kill and a Lady Never Talks Back: Gender Goes to War in Country Music,” *International Journal on World Peace* 24, no. 4 (2007): 85–106.

Interviews with the artists or industry insiders would be another source of potentially illuminating information. For example, in an article in *Billboard Magazine* written just before the start of the Iraq War, Darryl Worley is quoted as saying, “I personally believe that George W. Bush is doing his best to try to protect the American people. I hope the conflict in Iraq can be resolved in a peaceful manner, but under the present conditions I would support a war against Iraq.”⁴⁹ This reinforces what he expressed in the song, “Have You Forgotten?” In another *Billboard Magazine* article, the president of the label to which Aaron Tippin is signed asserted that “country radio is the beneficiary—wittingly or unwittingly—of having artists who think this way [i.e. patriotically] and are not afraid to say what they believe....Nobody else is going to play that kind of music.”⁵⁰ These views from inside the country music industry could help analysts understand why country music songs often take the form that they do.

It would be particularly helpful to analyze more than just “patriotic” songs and songs directly addressing September 11 or the subsequent conflicts. Many country songs that are not overtly patriotic still reinforce many of the conclusions reached in this article.⁵¹ It is, thus, necessary to note that one of the aims of this project is to arouse moral sensitivities, thereby helping religious ethicists and thinkers ask further ethical or theological questions. It is not to complete a cultural or sociological research analysis that requires a more solid and systemic data sampling and analysis.⁵² Admittedly, given the wealth of “data” available, it would perhaps be more useful or accurate to generalize about this imagined community based on a larger sample of songs that were not all so easily relatable to the events of 9/11.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Carla Hay, “Acts Line Up on Both Sides of War Debate,” *Billboard*, March 22, 2003, 1.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Phyllis Stark and Deborah Evans Price, “Upfront,” *Billboard*, May 3, 2003, 74.

⁵¹ In a related note, I recognize that this analysis is already partially skewed given that I am selecting songs that I deem to be patriotic and then asserting that patriotism is an attribute of the imagined country music community. By all means, it would be fair to criticize that this study is limited in its analysis of country music lyrics in that although the focus on country music provides insight into that particular industry ideology, the study does not do so for other music genres, nor other components such as the musical scores, the melody and accompaniment parts.

⁵² For example, although I do not intend to include a theological or ethical reflection in this paper, religious ethicists can critically reflect on this imagined community dividing American communities into “us” and “them.” This is primarily because most contemporary moral teachings across faith traditions and denominations pursue seeking peace; this peace occurs when the outsider has a place with “us” and truly becomes an insider. Peace is not simply an absence of conflict but, instead, hospitality, as well.

Finally, it would be valuable to extend this analysis to the issue of race/whiteness and American national identity. One may find it interesting to read through the discussion of country music and its reception with an analysis of the overwhelming whiteness of all the artists (and presumably, their fans) examined in this paper. This future research is important to the argument being presented since it is looking at a particular racialized construction or imagining of American national identity. Of course, the white country artists may have fan bases beyond white evangelical communities, but there needs to be some discussion of the (largely hidden) racialization of both the music—as white—and what it represents. Although that does largely mirror the popular construction of American national identity—as explicitly white but somehow ideologically inclusive and non-racialized—this does need some extended discussion for future projects.⁵³ Despite these shortcomings, it has been demonstrated through the analysis of patriotic music after 9/11 that country music producers and consumers created an imagined community of *us-American*. Certainly, there was a response to these events that was particular to country music, even if much work remains to be done in order to grasp the full dimensions of what that response entailed.

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⁵³ Cf. the extensive literature on race, identity, and whiteness in America in Christopher M. Driscoll, *White Lies: Race and Uncertainty in the Twilight of American Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315693088> and Paul Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation: Race and Religion in American History* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2016).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Kwon is an Assistant Professor of Moral Theology and Ethics at St. Mary's University of Minnesota. Dr. Kwon received his Ph.D. in Theological Ethics from Boston College in 2018 where he worked with Rev. Kenneth Himes, Lisa Cahill, and Stephen Pope. He also holds an MBA and degrees in social work and social policy, and draws on his education and professional experience in these fields in his work as a social ethicist. Dr. Kwon's primary areas of teaching and research include the ethics of war and peace, immigration ethics, environmental ethics, health care ethics, and, more recently, business ethics, all of which he approaches from a global perspective. He is currently working up his dissertation, entitled *Jus Post Bellum: Human Security and Political Reconciliation*, for publication.